

Sarah Teather finds a more meaningful job



The former Lib Dem Minister tells Peter Stanford about leaving ‘high-status guff’ in Parliament to find a new purpose working with refugees and asylum seekers

Politics can be a rough old business, not least for all those Liberal Democrat MPs turfed out of their seats by voters at the 2015 general election. Sarah Teather, though, has had more time than most to find her feet post-Westminster. The 41-year-old former Minister of State for Children and Families in the 2010-15 Coalition Government had already decided that she would not stand again for election, citing disillusionment with some aspects of her party under Nick Clegg’s leadership.

She spent last autumn on a temporary contract as an advocacy adviser to the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), travelling in Uganda, South Sudan and Lebanon, as well as to points on the route that fleeing migrants take across the European mainland. Now she is completing her first months as full-time director of the JRS in the United Kingdom and she gives every impression of being in her element.

“I’m not a politician any more,” she says as she shows me round the Hurtado Centre in London’s East End, where the JRS provides targeted support for those driven to destitution by Britain’s ever-more draconian asylum process. “I do something else now.” Teather believes she is where she is meant to be; to be specific, where God means her to be.

“‘Directed’ is slightly the wrong word,” she reflects, as we settle in her tiny glass-fronted office near the front door, and she explains how she has ended up here. “More like ‘invited’. It was nowhere near as clear as ‘directed’, and much more nuanced. If only everything was that straightforward ...”

